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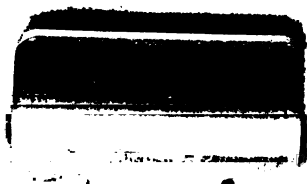
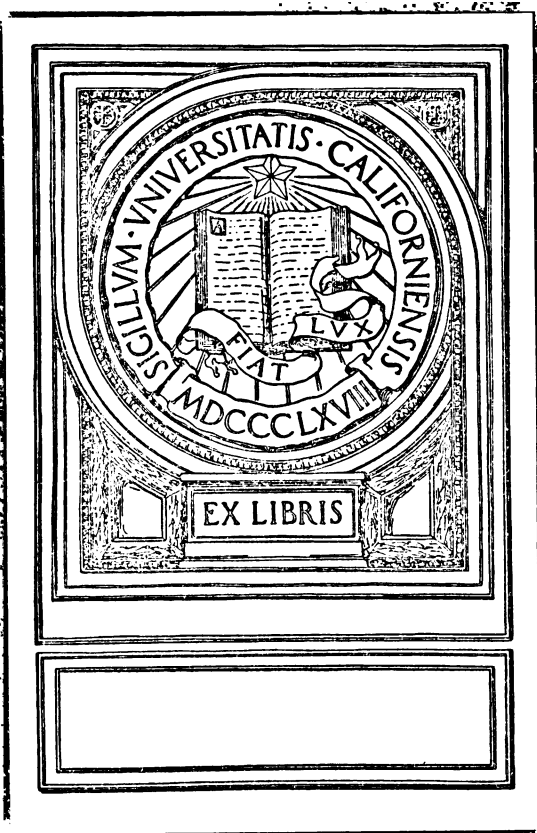
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A DISCOURSE

ON THE

MORAL USES OF THE SEA.

DELIVERED ON BOARD THE

PACKET-SHIP VICTORIA, CAPT. MORGAN,

AT SEA, JULY, 1845.

BY HORACE BUSHNELL, D. D.

PUBLISHED BY

REQUEST OF THE CAPTAIN AND PASSENGERS.

NEW YORK:
M. W. DODD,
BRICK CHURCH CHAPEL, CORNER OF PARK ROW AND SPRUCE STREET,
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HAVING been requested, in the absence of the Author, to superintend the printing of this Discourse, I venture to promise the reader no ordinary gratification and delight; and to express my admiration that a performance so full of thought, and life, and beauty, should have been thrown off, at the moment, on ship-board.

THOS. H. SKINNER.

October 13th, 1845.

TO THE
AUTHOR

DISCOURSE.

GENESIS i. 10.—“ And God called the dry land Earth ; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas : And God saw that it was good.”

Not a few have wondered why God, in creating a world for the habitation of man, should have chosen to hide three-fourths of its surface under a waste of waters. Doubtless it had been as easy for him to have made it a good round ball of meadow and plough-land. The field where leviathan plays might as well have been given to the reaper : the fickle domain of waters might as well have been erected into a firm continent of land, and covered with flourishing and populous empires. Why, then, asks the inquisitive thought of man, why so great waste in the works of God ? why has He ordained these great oceans, and set the habitable parts of the world thus islanded between them ? why spread out these vast regions of waste, to suppress the fruitfulness and stint the populousness of his realm ?

That He has done it we know. We also know his opinion of the arrangement—God saw that it was good. This should be enough to check all presumptuous judgments and over-

curious questions: God has done it, and in His view it is good.

Still, if our object be not to judge God, but to instruct ourselves, the whole field is open, and we may inquire at pleasure. And now that we are out upon this field of waters, cut off from the society of man, and from all the works of God, save the waters themselves, it cannot be inappropriate to inquire, What is the meaning and use of the sea? for what beneficent end or object may we suppose the Almighty Creator to have ordained its existence?

Were this question put by the natural philosopher, he would proceed at once to show that the sea tempers the climate of the land, making the heat less intense and the cold less rigorous; that the sea is a great store-house of provisions in itself, and also of waters for the land, without which even that were unfruitful; and many other things of a like nature, all of which may be true, and yet it cannot be said, with any confidence, that God could not have tempered the climate of the land as well, and made it as fruitful, without the sea.

It is only when we look at the *moral uses* of the world, its uses in the discipline of mind and character, where the free will of man, if it is to be preserved in its freedom, requires that God should condescend to particular means and expedients—it is only here that we seem to grasp those imperative and momentous reasons which can be said, with most confidence, to have determined God's arrangement in the matter we are considering. Indeed, there is a kind of impropriety in considering physical ends or causes as being, in any case, the final causes of God's works; for to God there is, in strict reason, no final cause but virtue or moral good. To this all

things are subordinate ; for this all things are done. When we say that the world is made for the habitation of man, we do not mean, if we rightly understand ourselves, that it is made to contain as many men as possible, in as much of plenty and ease as possible. In that case, most manifestly, God should have made as many acres of good productive land as possible ; nay, He should have made the earth as large as possible. Having it for his problem to raise the most numerous possible herd of men, He has only to enlarge his pasture. For the same reason, too, there should be no rigors of heat or of frost, no deserts, whether of sand or snow, no tempests, no fruitless seasons. Most manifestly the world is made to be the habitation of man, in some other and far different sense. Rather is it built to bless him as a moral creature, so ordered and fitted up that it shall most powerfully conduce to make him truly a man, a creature of intelligence, society, love and duty. Having this for his design, He has rather sought to limit than to extend the number of our race ; for a school of virtue, you will observe, may be too large, as well as too easy, for the benefit of the pupil. Therefore, He gives us a small globe to inhabit, narrows down our field still farther by rigors of perpetual frost, and barren mountains, and oceans of water—all that He may bring us into compass and compression, and set us under the holy discipline of danger, toil and hardship ; for these are the best, the only sufficient instruments of knowledge and character. To such a being as man, virtue can only be a conquest.

Prepared by views like these, let us go on to ask, *What are the moral uses of the sea ? wherein does it appear to have been added for the moral benefit of the world ?*

I think it will appear, as we prosecute this inquiry, that the ordinance of the sea is so thoroughly interwoven with all that is of the highest interest to man—the progress of society, art, government, science and religion—in a word, all that is included in moral advancement—that, without the sea, the world could not be considered a fit habitation for man. Nor will it be difficult for you, I trust, to believe that when the Almighty smiled upon the waters and the land, and pronounced them good, He had some especial reference to the moral benefit of that being whose residence He was preparing.

One great problem of God, in building a school for man, was, how to distribute the school ; for it is manifest that no one government, or society, could fill and occupy the whole domain—certainly not, without producing indefinite confusion and oppression, and sacrificing many of the most powerful stimulants to energy and advancement of every sort. Neither could it be done, without exalting the throne or governing power to such a pitch of eminence as would probably attract the religious homage of mankind, and set it at the head of a universal Lamaism. But if the world is to be distributed into nations, or kingdoms, which are likely to be always jealous of each other and sometimes hostile, they need to be separated by natural barriers, such as will prevent strife by circling them within definite boundaries, and, when they are in actual strife, will fortify them against destruction one from the other. This is effected, in part, by interposing mountains and rivers, but more effectually, and on a larger scale, by spreading seas and oceans between them. These great bodies of water can be passed more easily for

purposes of convenience than for those of destruction. Indeed, it is impossible for whole nations to pour across them for purposes of invasion, as across a mere geographical line. Nature is here the grand distributor and fortifier of nations. She draws her circle of waters, not around some castle or fortified citadel of art, but around whole nations themselves. Then it is within these fortified circles of nature, that nations are to unfold their power and have their advancement. Such was Greece, cut off from all the world by boundaries of rock and water, which no Xerxes with his invading army could effectually pass; having, at the same time, enough of strife and struggle within to keep her on the alert and waken all her powers to vigorous exercise. Such is England now. England, for so many ages past the foremost light of Europe, the bulwark of law, the great temple of religion, could never have been what it is, or anything but the skirt of some nation comparatively undistinguished, had not the Almighty drawn his circle of waters around it, and girded it with strength, to be the right hand of his power. It is the boundaries of nations, too, that give them locality and settle those historic associations which are the conscious life of society and the source of all great and high emotions; otherwise they fly to perpetual vagrancy and dissipation—there is no settlement, no sense of place or compassion, and, as nothing takes root, nothing grows. Thus the ancient Scythian, roaming over the vast levels of the north, is succeeded by the modern Tartar; both equally wild and uncultivated—the father of three thousand years ago and the son of to-day.

Again it will be found that the oceans and seas have sometimes contributed, beyond all power of estimation, to the

moral and social advancement of the race, by separating one part of the world even from the knowledge of another, and preserving it for discovery and occupation at an advanced period of history. Had the territory of the United States been conjoined to the eastern shore of Asia, or the western of Europe, or had there been no oceans interposed to break the continuous circle of land, it is obvious that the old and worn-out forms of civilization would have wanted a spur to reform and improvement that is now supplied. When, at length, the New World was discovered, then was man called out, as it were, to begin again. The trammels of ancient society and custom, which no mere human power could burst, were burst by the fiat of Providence, and man went forth to try his fortunes once more, carrying with him all the advantages of a previous experience. I set up for the United States no invidious claim of precedence. We acknowledge our rawness and obscurity, in comparison with the splendor and high refinement of more ancient nations. We only claim it as our good fortune that we are a new nation, peopled by men of a new world, who had new principles to be tested, for the common benefit of mankind. As such the eye of the world is upon us, and has been for many years. The great thought of our institutions—the happiness and elevation of the individual man—is gradually and silently working its way into all the old fabrics of legitimacy in Christendom, and compelling the homage of power in all its high places. Whatever motion there has been in European affairs for the last half century—all the mitigations of law, the dynasties subverted, the constitutions conceded, the enlarged liberty of conscience and the press, popular educa-

tion—everything that goes to make society beneficent—has been instigated, more or less directly, by the great idea that is embodied and represented in the institutions of the United States. This same great idea, the well-being and character of the individual man, has been brought forth, too, to offer itself to the world, just at the right time. Without it, we may well doubt whether the institutions of Europe had not come to their limit, beyond which they had not, in themselves, any power of advancement. Had it come earlier, Europe was not ready for it. The immense advantage that is thus to accrue to mankind, as regards the great interests of truth, society and religious virtue, from the fact that our Western Hemisphere was kept hidden for so many ages, beyond an impassable ocean, to be opened, in due time, for the planting and propagation of new ideas, otherwise destined to perish, no mind can estimate. Nor is this process of planting yet exhausted. There are islands in the Southern Oceans larger than England, that are yet to become seats of power and of empire, and possibly to shine as lights of Antarctic history eclipsing those of the north; or, if not eclipsing, giving to all the northern climes, both of the Eastern and Western Worlds, the experiment of new principles, needful to their progress and happiness.

But it is another and yet more impressive view of the moral utility of seas and oceans, that, while they have a disconnecting power operating in the ways first specified, they have at the same time a connecting power, bringing all regions and climes into correspondence and commercial interchange. Fortified by oceans and seas against injury from each other, they are yet united by the same for purposes of mutual benefit.

Were there no seas, were the globe covered by a continuous sheet of land, how different the history of the past from what it has been! how different the moral and intellectual state of human society from what it now is! There being no medium of commerce, save that of land travel, no intercourse could exist between nations remote from each other. They would know each other only by a kind of tradition, as now we know the past. Tradition, too, in its long and uncertain transit across the longitude of the world, would clothe itself in fable, and we, instead of being made to feel the common brotherhood of man as now, should probably be fast in the belief that the opposite hemisphere of the world is peopled by giants, Centaurs, Anthropophagi, and such-like fabulous monsters. There would, of course, be no commerce, except between nations that are adjacent; and society, being life without motion or stimulus, would rot itself down into irredeemable bigotry and decrepitude. God would not have it so. On the ocean, which is the broad public highway of the Almighty, nations pass and repass, visit and revisit each other, and those which are remote as freely as those which are near. And it is this fluid element that gives fluidity and progress to the institutions and opinions of the race. It is only in the great inland regions of the world, as in Central Africa and Asia, that bigotry and inveterate custom have their seat. In these vast regions that never saw the sea, regions remote from the visits of commerce and the moving world, men have lived from age to age without progress, or the idea of progress, crushed under their despotisms, held fast in the chains of indomitable superstition, rooted down like their trees, and motionless as their mountains. In the mean time, the shores and

islands of the world have felt the pulse of human society, and yielded themselves to progress. It is, in a word, this fluid sea, on whose bosom the free winds of heaven are wafting us to-day, which represents all mobility and progress in the human state. Without this interposed, the rock-based continents themselves were not more fixed than the habits and opinions of mankind. On the other hand, you will observe that the prejudices of men who live upon and by the waters are never invincible. They admit of change, somewhat by habit and association, as their element changes, and they shift their sail to the winds. Hence it was, in part, may we not believe, that our Saviour began his mission on the shores of Genesaret, and among the boatmen there. Out of these, too, he chose his apostles, because they had the ductility requisite to receive new truths and new opinions of duty. Among them he had few prejudices to encounter, while at Jerusalem every mind was set against him with obstinacy as firm as the rocks of Zion. So it was never a Babylon, or a Timbuctoo, or any city of the inland regions, that was forward to change and improvement. But it was a Tyre, queen of the sea; a Carthage, sending out her ships, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, to Britain and the Northern Isles; an Athens, an Alexandria—these were the seats of art, and thought, and learning, and liberal improvement of every sort. So, too, it was the Italian commercial cities that broke up the dark ages, and gave the modern nations that impulse which set them forward in their career of art and social refinement, and, remotely speaking, of liberty.

The spirit of commerce, too, is the spirit of peace, its interest the interest of peace, and peace is the element of all

moral progress, as war is the element of all barbarism and desolation. Every ship that sails the ocean is a pledge for peace to the extent of its value—every sail a more appropriate symbol of peace than the olive-branch itself. Commerce, too, has at length changed the relative position of nations. Once upon a footing of barbarism, they are now placed on a footing of friendship and civilization. In the most splendid days of Athens, piracy was a trade, not a crime; for it was the opinion that nations are naturally hostile, and will, of course, prey upon each other. But now, at length, commerce has created for itself a great system of international and commercial law, which, to a certain extent, makes one empire of all the nations, maintaining the rights of person and property, when abroad upon the ocean, or in other lands, as carefully and efficiently as if there were but one nation or people on the globe. Search the history of man, from the beginning till now, you will find among all the arts, inventions and institutions of the race, no one so beneficent, none that reveals so broad a stride of progress, as this. And it promises yet to go on, extending its sway, till it has given rules to all the conduct of nations, provided redress for all injuries, and thus lawed out forever all war from the earth.

The nations engaged in commerce will, of course, be the most forward nations. In perpetual intercourse with each other, they will ever be adopting the inventions, copying the good institutions, and rectifying the opinions, one of another; for the man of commerce is never a bigot. He goes to buy, in other nations, commodities that are wanted in his own. He is, therefore, in the habit of valuing what is valuable in other countries, and so, proportionally, are the people or na-

tion that consumes the commodities of other countries. And so much is there in this, that the government, the literature, nay, even the religion of every civilized nation must receive a modifying influence from all the nations with whom it maintains an active commerce. In opinions, literature, arts, laws—nay, in everything—they must gradually approximate, till they coalesce, at last, in one and the same catholic standard of value and excellence. Commerce is itself catholic, and it seems to be the sublime purpose of God, in its appointment, to make everything else so, that, as all are of one blood, so, at last, they shall be one conscious brotherhood.

In the mean time, the nations most forward in art and civilization are approaching, by the almost omnipresent commerce they maintain, all the rude and barbarous nations of the world, carrying with them, wherever they go, all those signs of precedence by which these nations may be impressed with a sense of their backwardness, and set forward in a career of improvement. They need only be visited by the ships, or especially the steam-vessels, of European commerce, to see that they are in their childhood, and there must remain, except as they adopt the science and the institutions of European nations. What, consequently, do we behold? Not the wilds of Northern Russia only, not the islands only of the sea, becoming members of European laws, arts and manners—but the throne of Siam inquiring after the methods and truths of the West; all British India studying English, in a sense more real than the study of words; Muscat sending over to examine and copy our arts; both branches of the Mohammedan empire receiving freely, and carefully protecting, Christian travelers, and adopting, as fast as they can,

the European modes of war and customs of society ; China beginning to doubt whether she is indeed the Celestial Empire, and doomed, ere twenty years are gone by, to be as emulous of what is European as Egypt or Turkey now is. All this by the power of commerce. They feel our shadow cast on their weakness, and their hearts sink within them, as if they had seen a people taller than they. For the same reason, too, the false gods are trembling in their seats the world over, and all the strongholds of spiritual delusion shaking to the fall. The sails of commerce are the wings of truth. Wherever it goes (and where does it not ?) the power of science, and of all that belongs to cultivated manhood, is felt. The universal air becomes filled with new ideas, and man looks out from the prison of darkness in which he has been lying, chained and blinded, sees a dawn arising on the hills, and feels the morning-breath of truth and liberty.

What I have said, thus far, is not so distinctively religious as some might expect in a Christian discourse. But you will observe that all which I have said, in this general way, of human advancement, as connected with the uses of the sea, involves religious advancement, both as regards knowledge and character. All the advancement, too, of which I have spoken, is, in one view, the work of Christianity ; for this it is which has given to Christendom its precedence. And it is precisely the office of the Christian faith that it shall thus elevate and bless mankind—bless them, not in their devotions only, not in their sacraments, or in passing to other worlds, but in everything that constitutes their mortal life—in society, art, science, wealth, government—all that adorns, elevates, fortifies, and purifies their being. You will also perceive that the

very tone of Christian piety itself, especially where it is not tempered, as in the United States, by the presence and toleration of all varieties of faith and worship, needs to be modulated and softened by the influence of a general intercourse with mankind; for such is the narrowness of man, that even the love of Christ itself is in perpetual danger of dwindling to a mere bigot prejudice in the soul; mistaking its mere forms for substance; becoming less generous in its breadth the more intense it is in degree; and even measuring out the judgment of the world by the thimble in which its own volume and dimensions are cast. The piety of the Church can never attain to its proper power and beauty till it has become thoroughly catholic in its spirit; a result which is to be continually favored and assisted by the influence of a catholic commerce. I do, indeed, anticipate a day for man, when commerce itself shall become religious, and religion commercial; when the holy and the useful shall be blended in a common life of brotherhood and duty, comprising all the human kindred of the globe.

Such an expectation, too, is the more reasonable, when you consider that commerce is so manifestly showing herself to be the handmaid of religion, by opening, as I just now said, the way for the universal spread of Christianity. It quells the prejudices of the natives, and shames away all confidence in their gods and institutions, and then the Church of God, as the ground is cleared, or being cleared, comes in to fill the chasm that is made, by offering a better faith. What, then, do we see, but that the ocean is becoming the pathway of the Lord? He is visiting the nations, and they shake before him! The islands give up first—the continents

must follow! One thing is always sure—either commerce must fold up its sails, and the ocean dry up in its bed, (which few will expect,) or else every form of idolatry and barbarous worship must cease from the world. This I say apart from all the Christian effects and instrumentalities supplied by missions; for these are as yet insignificant, compared with those mighty workings of Providence whose path is in the sea. But if these precede, those must follow. As man is a religious being, God will never undertake to rob him of a false religion without giving him a better. Neither can any Christian mind contemplate the rapid and powerful changes which, in our day, have been wrought in the practical position of the heathen nations, without believing that some great design of Providence is on foot, that promises the universal spread of the Christian faith and the spiritual redemption of all the races of mankind. “Lift up thine eyes round about and see, all they gather themselves together they come unto thee! The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee!”

The sea has yet another kind of moral and religious use, which is more direct and immediate. The liquid acres of the deep, tossing themselves evermore to the winds, and rolling their mighty anthem round the world, may be even the most valuable and productive acres God has made. Great emotions and devout affections are better fruits than corn, more precious luxuries than wine or oil. And God has built the world with a visible aim to exercise his creature with whatever is lofty in conception, holy in feeling, and filial in purpose towards himself. All the trials and storms of the

land have this same object. To make the soul great, He gives us great dangers to meet, great obstacles to conquer. Deserts, famines, pestilences, walking in darkness, regions of cold and wintry snow, hail and tempest—none of these are, in his view, elements of waste and destruction, because they go to fructify the moral man. As related to the moral kingdom of God, they are engines of truth, purity, strength, and all that is great and holy in character. The sea is a productive element of the same class. What man that has ever been upon the deep has not felt his nothingness, and been humbled, for the time at least, of his pride? How many have received lessons of patience from the sea? How many here have bowed, who never bowed before, to the tremendous sovereignty of God? How many prayers, otherwise silent, have gone up, to fill the sky and circle the world, from wives and mothers, imploring his protecting presence with the husbands and sons they have trusted to the deep? It is of the greatest consequence, too, that such a being as God should have images prepared to express Him and set Him before the mind of man in all the grandeur of his attributes. These He has provided in the heavens and the sea, which are the two great images of his vastness and power; the one, remote, addressing itself to cultivated reason and science—the other, nigh, to mere sense, and physically efficient, a liquid symbol of the infinitude of God. We ourselves, upon it resting in peace or quailing with dread, as if wafted by his goodness, or tossed by the tremendous billows of his will. It is remarkable, too, how many of the best and most powerful images of God in the Scriptures are borrowed from the sea.

“Canst thou by searching find out God? The measure thereof

is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”—“ Thy judgments are a great deep.”—“ Who shut up the sea with doors ? I made the cloud the garment thereof, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”—“ Which alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.”—“ Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.”—“ The waters saw thee, O Lord, the waters saw thee ; they were afraid, the depths also were troubled !” Every kind of vastness—immensity, infinity, eternity, mystery, omnipotence—has its type in the sea, and there is as much more of God in the world, for man to see and feel, as the sea can express, and as much more of worship and piety as there is of God.

Doubtless we have all been happy in the pleasant society and lively scenes that have thus far distinguished our voyage. Have you seen the Almighty, too, in his path upon the waters ? Have you felt his power, blessed yourself in the grandeur of his mystery, leaned upon the majesty of his purposes with a more feeling and filial devotion ? The heart that finds no God upon the sea, and delights not there to feel the waves of emotion from his presence roll over it, may go where it will in quest of the pitiful and shallow pleasures appropriate to its capacity, but it has no room for God, or, it would seem, for anything great or holy.

Doubtless it will occur to some of you, that the moral and religious character of the seafaring race does not favor the view I have taken of the benefits accruing to mankind from the sea. This, however, is rather the fault of the land than of the water. It is here, on land, that the vices of the sea

have their cause and sustenance. There is not a more open, fine-spirited race of beings on earth than the seafaring race. But when they reach the land, they are too much neglected by the good, and always surrounded by the wicked, who hasten to make them their prey. Latterly, more has been attempted for their benefit, and the results accomplished are such as cannot but surprise us. Far enough are they from hopelessness, if so great a change can be wrought in so short a time, by means so limited. Indeed, I might urge it as one of the best proofs of the mitigating and softening influence of the sea, that no dejected race of landsmen could ever have been made to show the effects of Christian effort and kindness so speedily, or by so many and fine examples of Christian character. And I fully believe that the time is at hand when all that pertains to commerce is to be sanctified by virtue and religion, as of right it should be ; when the mariners will be blended with all the other worshipers on shore, in the exercise of common privileges, and as members of a common brotherhood ; when the ships will have their Sabbath, and become temples of praise on the deep ; when habits of temperance, and banks for saving, will secure them in thrift, and assist to give them character ; when they will no more live an unconnected, isolated, and therefore reckless life, but will have their wives and children vested here and there, in some neat cottage among the hills, to be to them, when abroad, the anchor of their affections and the security of their virtue ; when they will go forth, also, to distant climes and barbarous shores, with all their noble and generous traits sanctified by religion, to represent the beauty of Christ to men, and become examples of all that

is good and beneficent in his Gospel. Be it ours to aid a purpose so desirable, theirs to realize it in their conduct and character.

I cannot better conclude, than by referring to a thought suggested by my text, and illustrated by my whole course of remark, viz. this : That God made the world for salvation. Even in that earliest moment, when our orb was rising out of chaos, and reeking with the moisture of a first morning, God is seen to have been studying the moral benefit and blessing of our race. He did not make the seas too large. He laid them where they should be. He swept their boundaries with his finger, in the right place. The floods lift up their voice, the floods lift up their waves, but they are not too furious or dangerous. The Lord on High is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. God manages and guides this army of waters—every wave is in his purposes and rolls at his feet. He is over all as a God of salvation, and the field He covers with his waters He makes productive. When He called the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters called he seas, then had He in mind the kingdom of his Son, and the glory and happiness of a race yet uncreated. He looked—He viewed it again—He saw that it was good. And the good that He saw is the good that is coming, and to come, when the sea shall have fulfilled its moral purpose, and all kindred and people that dwell upon its shores shall respond to the ever-living anthem it raises to its Author. Then let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands, and the hills be joyful together before the Lord !

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